March 2006

Overview of 2005 Similar Schools Ranks

Based on the Academic Performance Index

In March 2006, public schools in California received their seventh Academic Performance Index (API) Base reports. The API is the cornerstone of the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999. It measures the academic performance and progress of schools. Annual growth targets for future academic improvement are determined for schools based on how far each school is from the statewide target. Schools that reach their annual targets may be rewarded. Schools that do not meet their targets may be eligible for interventions or subject to sanctions. Statewide ranks and similar schools ranks are provided in the API Base reports in addition to the school's API score.

API

The API is a numeric index or scale that ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. A school's score or placement on the API is an indicator of a school's performance level. The state has set 800 as the API score that schools should strive to meet. A school's growth is measured by how well it is moving toward (or past) that goal. Schools that fall short of 800 will be required to meet annual growth targets until the statewide target of 800 is reached. Schools that already meet or exceed the statewide target of 800 should continue working to improve the academic performance of all of their students.

API Indicators

The API score summarizes the results of various indicators (i.e., statewide assessments). Indicators used in calculating the 2005 API Base include:

- California Standards Tests (CSTs)
  - English-language arts, grades two through eleven, including a writing assessment at grades four and seven
  - Mathematics, grades two through eleven
  - History-social science, grades eight, ten, and eleven
  - Science, grades five and nine through eleven
- California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) in English-language arts and mathematics, grades two through eleven, for students with the most severe cognitive disabilities
- California Achievement Test, Sixth Edition Survey (CAT/6 Survey), norm-referenced test in reading, language, spelling, and mathematics, grades three and seven
- CAHSEE, in English-language arts and mathematics, grade ten and grade eleven (if the student passed)

2005 API Base Reports

Generally, API results are reported twice a year: (1) base year reports after the first of the calendar year, and (2) growth reports each fall. This pair of reports is based on APIs calculated in exactly the same fashion with the same indicators but using test results from two different years.

2005–06 API Reports

2005 API Base	2006 API Growth
■ Shows API based on 2005 test results ■ Sets targets for growth in the API for 2006	■ Will show API based on 2006 test results ■ Will show growth in the API from 2005 to 2006 ■ Will show whether targets were met
(released March 2006)	**(released August 2006)**

The 2005 API Base report for a school includes the following:

- Number of Students Included in the 2005 API Base
- 2005 API Base (scale of 200 to 1000)
- 2005 Statewide Rank (scale of 1 to 10)
- 2005 Similar Schools Rank (scale of 1 to 10)
- 2005–06 Growth Target
- 2006 API Target (2005 API Base + 2005–06 Growth Target)
- Subgroup Information
- Demographic Characteristics
- Content Area Weights
- Similar Schools Report (schools only)

Schools in the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) and school districts receive API Base scores but do not receive ranks or targets. The API reports and detailed information about the API can be found on the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site at *http://api.cde.ca.gov*.

Statewide and Similar Schools Ranks

The API reports include a statewide rank and a similar schools rank. This information shows where a school ranks academically on a scale of one to ten compared with other schools statewide (statewide rank) as well as compared with 100 other schools that have similar demographic characteristics (similar schools rank).

To calculate API ranks, schools' API scores are separated by school type: elementary, middle, and high schools. For each of the three types, schools' API scores are first sorted from lowest to highest statewide and then divided into ten equal groups (or deciles) ranked from lowest (one) to highest (ten). This first process produces the statewide ranks. A second process produces the similar schools ranks, as shown below.

Statewide Ranks	Similar Schools Ranks
• Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, high school) • School's API compared to all other schools in the state	• Calculated separately by school type (elementary, middle, high school) • School's API compared to 100 other schools with similar demographic characteristics

Specific steps for calculating a similar schools rank are described under the "Calculation" section of questions and answers shown on page 3.

California public schools serve students with many different backgrounds and needs. As a result, schools face different educational challenges. The similar schools ranks allow schools to look at their academic performance compared to other schools with some of the same opportunities and challenges.

The similar schools ranks can be used in at least two ways. First, schools can use this information as a reference point for judging their academic achievement against other schools facing similar challenges. Second, schools may improve their academic performance by studying what similar schools with higher rankings are doing.

Description of Similar Schools Ranks

The similar schools ranks compare an individual school's API to the 100 schools in its comparison group. Schools are ranked in ten equal groups (deciles) from the lowest (one) to the highest (ten). A description of the **similar schools ranks** follows:

Similar Schools Rank	Description
	This school's API is:
9 or 10	Well-above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
7 or 8	Above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
5 or 6	About average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
3 or 4	Below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
1 or 2	Well-below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics

Similar Schools Ranks Questions and Answers

The comparison of similar schools is required by the PSAA and provides additional information about schools beyond that provided by APIs and statewide ranks. The PSAA requires that similar schools comparisons be based on specified demographic school characteristics (shown in the table on page 4).

Calculation

What steps are used in calculating the similar schools ranks?

Several steps are used to calculate the similar schools ranks. First, schools are divided into grade level categories (elementary, middle, and high schools). Then, the School Characteristics Index (SCI), a composite of the school's demographic characteristics, is calculated for each school. Next, a comparison group of 100 similar schools is formed, based on similar SCIs. Last, the similar schools rank for each school is calculated. This ranking is based on the school's API Base compared with the Base APIs of other similar schools in the comparison group.

What is the SCI and how is it calculated?

The SCI combines the demographic characteristics of a school. (See page 4 for a listing of the demographic characteristics used to identify similar schools.) It is calculated through a statistical procedure that produces a single index based on all of the factors included. Schools with SCIs that are close in numerical value face similar educational challenges and opportunities.

How is a specific similar schools rank determined?

A comparison group for each school is formed by taking the 50 schools with SCIs just above the schools' API and the 50 just below. The 100 schools in the comparison group are then sorted from lowest to highest according to their API Base and divided into 10 equal-sized groups (deciles). The API of the school is then compared to the APIs of the schools in its group. The school is assigned a decile rank based on this comparison, and that is the rank shown on the report.

Do all 100 schools in the same similar schools rank (the comparison group) have the same demographic characteristics?

Each school is unique; therefore, it is impossible to find similar schools that match in every way. In order to form large enough groups of similar schools for meaningful ranks, the procedure used for each SCI allows for some differences between schools.

Does the comparison group for a school remain the same from year to year?

No. Demographic characteristics change from year to year. In March 2006, schools received a 2005 similar schools rank, which compared the schools' 2005 API level to a group of 100 similar schools. In March 2007, schools will receive a 2006 similar schools rank which will compare their 2006 API level to a *new* group of 100 similar schools. The new group of 100 similar schools may or may not change substantially from the previous year.

How can I find out which schools are in the comparison group for a school?

The list of the 100 schools and the Base APIs of the schools included in each school's similar schools comparison group can be found in a school's Similar Schools Report on the CDE Web site at *http://api.cde.ca.gov*. Click on "Reports" and "School Level Reports." Then type the name of the school. On the school report, click on "Similar Schools Report" in the upper right section of the page.

Results

Another school in the school district has similar students and almost exactly the same API score but a different "similar schools" rank. How can that be?

The SCIs are calculated using many demographic characteristics. Even if schools appear quite similar in some characteristics, they may differ with respect to others. Small differences in two school's demographic characteristics can result in different SCIs and, therefore, in different groups of similar schools. If one school's comparison group

has a different range of API scores than the other school's comparison group, the two schools' ranks may differ.

The similar schools rank for our school is higher (about the same, lower) than its statewide rank. How should that be interpreted?

These ranks are calculated in completely different ways. The statewide API rank compares a school to other schools statewide. The similar schools rank compares a school to 100 schools similar to it.

Does the calculation of the API or similar schools ranks affect the scores a student receives on statewide tests?

No, the calculation of the API and the similar schools ranks does not affect the score a student receives on statewide tests.

How can the similar schools rank for a school be raised?

The SCI, from which the group of similar schools is determined, is designed to reflect demographic characteristics *not* under a school's control. The school should focus on ways to raise its API by improving instruction and student achievement. These efforts should help improve the academic growth of the school, its API, and its school rankings.

For More Information

Further information about the PSAA and API can be found on the CDE Web site at *http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/*.

Demographic Characteristics Used for Similar Schools Ranks

Original Characteristics (established by PSAA in 1999)	New Characteristics (established by State Board of Education in 2006)
Student mobility Student ethnicity • African American (not of Hispanic origin) • American Indian or Alaska Native • Asian • Filipino • Hispanic or Latino • Pacific Islander • White (not of Hispanic origin) School socioeconomic status • Parent education level OR • Student participation in the free or reduced-price lunch program (also known as the National School Lunch Program, or NSLP) Teachers who are fully credentialed Teachers who hold emergency credentials Students who are English learners Average class size • Kindergarten to grade three • Grades four to six • Core academic courses in departmentalized programs Whether the school operates a multi-track, year-round educational program	Grade span enrollments • Grade two • Grade six • Grades seven to eight • Grades nine to eleven Students in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program Students with disabilities Reclassified fluent-English-proficient (RFEP) students Migrant education students Students in full-day-reduced size classes

These demographic data used for the 2005 similar schools ranks came from several sources, including the 2005 administration of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program and the 2004 California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS). The CBEDS is a data collection conducted by the CDE.